

## FutureBeef: coordinated and collaborative delivery of online information for the northern beef industry

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**Abstract.** FutureBeef is a collaboration between the Queensland, Northern Territory and Western Australian government departments and Meat & Livestock Australia to provide coordinated delivery of online information for the northern beef industry. Achievements 2018-2022 include: a website with 1222 pages and over 1.7M pageviews and 954,000 visitors; 49 webinars with almost 6900 registrations, over 3000 attendees and 27,200 webinar recording views; 54 eBulletins to 6288 subscribers, with an average open rate of almost 33% and click rate of 8.6%; Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn with 18,821 combined followers and over 85,000 engagements. The FutureBeef website is the key communication tool, while webinars, ebulletins and social media raise awareness and direct users to the website. Improvements to all these tools are critical to enhance user experience.

**Keywords:** FutureBeef, website, webinars, social media, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, eBulletin, YouTube.

### Introduction

The provision of timely, relevant and accurate information and the delivery of industry engagement activities are essential for the northern beef industry. However, it is difficult and inefficient for primary industry government organisations and industry bodies to do this in isolation by creating and maintaining beef-related information on their own websites, plus managing promotion and engagement with industry members.

FutureBeef provides a coordinated and collaborative approach to the delivery of online information, promotion and industry engagement, and continues to give the northern beef industry access to a 24/7 one-stop-shop for beef information. FutureBeef is a collaborative extension program in northern Australia involving the following partners:

- Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF)
- Northern Territory Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade (DITT)
- Western Australia Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD)
- Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA).

FutureBeef uses the following online tools: website, webinars (and their recordings), social media channels and eBulletin.

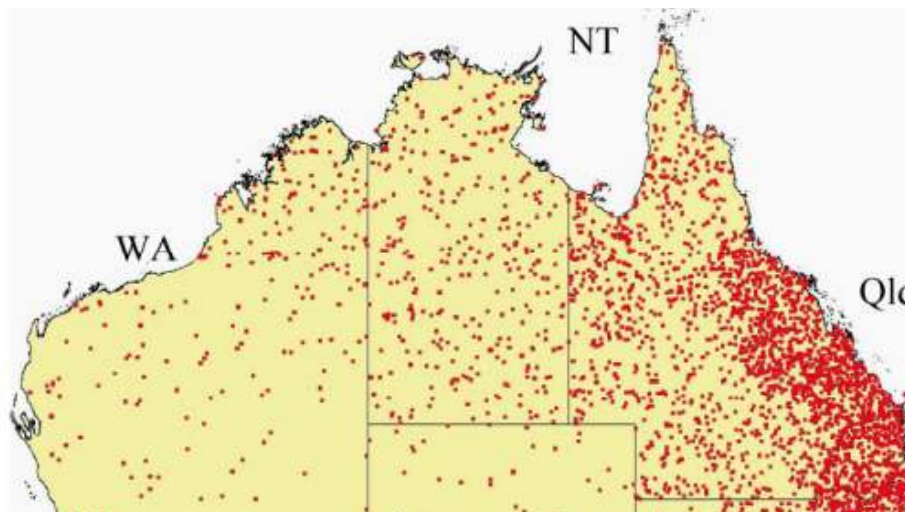
### Background

FutureBeef was instigated in 2012 by the three state agricultural departments in Queensland, Northern Territory and Western Australia as well as Meat & Livestock Australia. It was prompted as a result of the National Beef Production Research Development and Extension Strategy (Primary Industries Standing Committee – R&D Sub-Committee 2010) and the need to achieve greater alignment, co-ordination and co-operation in the strategic delivery of northern beef extension activities (James & McIntosh 2017).

FutureBeef was based on the existing DAF FutureBeef extension program (James & McIntosh 2017). The aim of the FutureBeef Program was to improve business productivity, sustainability and profitability of the beef industry, through development and extension activities to accelerate adoption of best practice management and new technologies (Meat & Livestock Australia et al. 2012). There have been three funded collaborative programs:

- E.INV.1412: 30 April 2014 to 30 July 2017
- L.GBF.1802: 23 March 2018 to 28 February 2022 (program discussed in this article)
- P.PSH.1425: 15 May 2023 to 1 September 2027.

Northern Australian beef properties are dispersed across 4.3 million square kilometres (Figure 1). Providing services to approximately 14,000 cattle businesses in this region (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2020) is a formidable challenge (Table 1).

**Figure1. Distribution of beef cattle properties across northern Australia**

Source: Primary Industries Standing Committee – R&D Sub-Committee 2010.

**Table 1. Estimated hectares of land mainly used for grazing and number of agricultural businesses**

Location	Hectares	Number of businesses
Queensland	120,403,587	13,650
Northern Territory	51,814,281	206
Western Australian Rangelands	61,491,415	220

Source: ABS 2020.

Originally FutureBeef used a multi-channel approach to provide information, including face-to-face activities, printed materials, a website, eBulletins, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. This mixed approach enables a more effective communication strategy than any one single approach (Kulich 2014). While face-to-face activities are usually better for building trust and rapport (Holmes & Kozlowski 2015; Goldstein & Glueck 2016), online technologies can complement them (Min 2007; Cipolletta et al. 2017) and provide an innovative means to connect in real-time without needing to travel (James 2010).

However, since 2018 FutureBeef has focused primarily on the delivery of online or eExtension for the northern beef industry and has not delivered face to face workshops and events. FutureBeef does support face to face events conducted by other projects and collaborators through the website events calendar and promotion in the eBulletin and social media.

It is inefficient for each of the FutureBeef partner organisations to create and maintain beef-related information on their own websites, let alone manage online engagement with industry members. The project was designed to provide a coordinated approach to the delivery of online information and industry engagement to save the four organisations from having to re-invent the wheel themselves and inadvertently providing a confusing array of overlapping information.

### Methodology

The project direction is set and reviewed by an Advisory Committee representing all project partners. The project extension and communication activities are delivered by staff from all four partner organisations.

Information is made accessible through FutureBeef's online communication tools such as the website, webinars, eBulletin and social media as outlined below:

- Website: An existing externally hosted Word Press website allows content to be easily added and maintained.
- Webinars: An existing GoToWebinar licence is used to allow up to 1000 attendees to participate in webinars.
- eBulletin: An existing MailChimp licence is used to create and distribute eBulletins to subscribers.

- Social media: Existing Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn accounts are used, with existing Hootsuite and SmarterQueue licences used to manage and schedule the distribution of social media posts.
- Multimedia: An existing YouTube account is used to host multimedia materials including webinar recordings and videos.

## Results and Discussion

### Website

The FutureBeef website was launched in May 2012 and currently has (at January 2022) 1222 pages. Since July 2017 the website has had a total of 1,744,894 views from 954,380 visitors (Table 2). FutureBeef website visitor numbers vary between years due to various factors including seasonal conditions (as this causes people to look for specific information on drought and floods), new legislative requirements (also causing visitors to look for specific information) as well as how effective our social media posts and ebulletin articles are at directing people to the website.

During this period (July 2017-January 2022) most site visits were from within Australia (50%), followed by United States (16%), India (4%), South Africa (3%) and United Kingdom (3%). The Australian based site visits were primarily from Queensland (37%), New South Wales (30%) and Victoria (18%) with lower numbers from Northern Territory and Western Australia reflecting fewer grazing businesses in those jurisdictions.

**Table 2. FutureBeef website metrics (July 2017 to January 2022)**

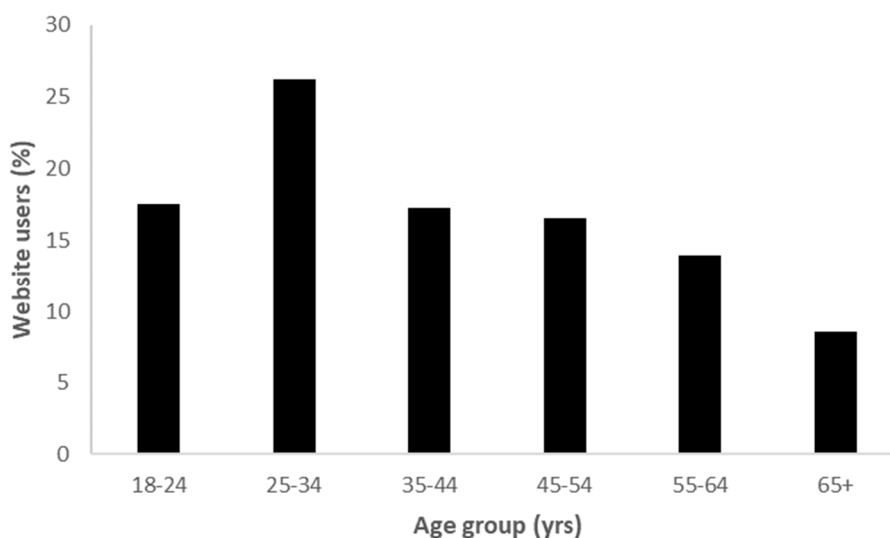
Website metric	2021-2022*	2020-2021	2019-2020	2018-2019	2017-2018
Visitors	131,355	215,193	210,585	231,461	165,786
Pageviews	234,360	377,078	367,002	422,511	343,943

Source: Google Analytics in Sallur et al. (2022).

\*Data only until 31 January 2022.

The highest proportion of site visitors are 25-34 years old (26%) and lowest 65+ (9%), Fig 2., while the split between visitors by gender is 55% male and 45% female.

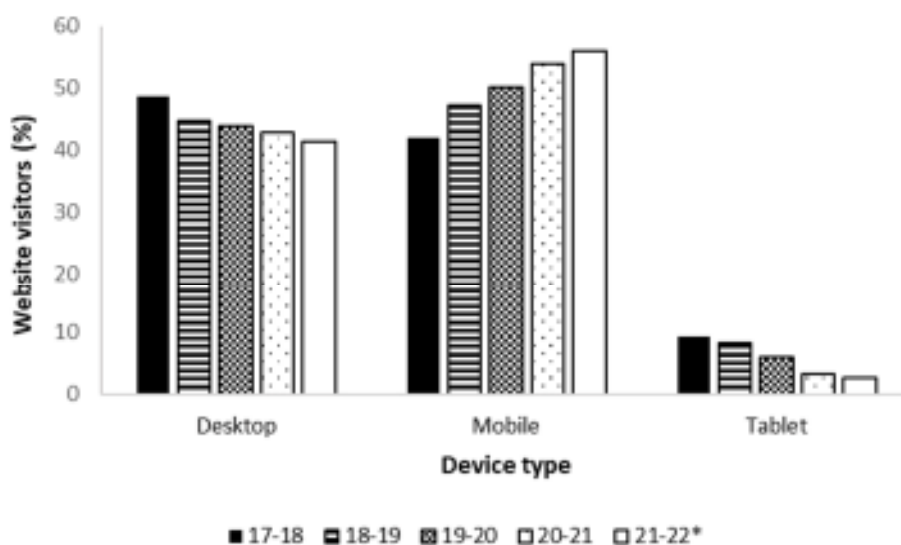
**Figure 2. Age distribution of FutureBeef website users**



Source: Google Analytics in Sallur et al. (2022).

The devices most used to access the FutureBeef website are shown in Figure 3, with an increased usage over time of mobiles compared to desktop and tablets due to the increasing popularity of mobile devices.

**Figure 3. The devices most commonly used to access the FutureBeef website across years from 2017 to 2022**



Source: Google Analytics in Sallur et al. 2022.

\*Data only until 31 January 2022.

### Webinars

**Live webinars** Forty-nine webinars were conducted from 1 July 2017 to 31 January 2022. A total of 6899 people registered for these webinars (range of 31-370 per webinar) and 3029 attended live (range of 12-166), with an average live attendance of 44%. This is a similar attendance rate to the previous FutureBeef project 2014-2017, which was 42% (James & McIntosh 2017). Producers accounted for approximately 36% of both total registrations and total live attendees with the remainder being government staff, consultants, agents, Natural Resource Management groups and others.

Those that attended the FutureBeef webinars were asked to provide feedback and a total of 959 (32%) attendees completed the online feedback form. This is comparable to the webinar feedback response rate of 34% from the FutureBeef project 2014-2017 (James & McIntosh 2017). The webinars were rated as an average of 7.7 out of 10 for improving knowledge (range 6.1-10) and 8.4 out of 10 for satisfaction (range 6.7-9.8), akin to the previous FutureBeef project 2014-2017 which reported 7.7/10 for improved knowledge and 8.3/10 for satisfaction (James & McIntosh 2017).

Attendees were also asked if, because of the webinar, they intended to make a practice change and how likely they were to make this change. Overall, 53% of webinar attendees intended to make a practice change and 20% of these were very likely to make this change. Unfortunately, this metric was not recorded in the previous FutureBeef project 2014-2017.

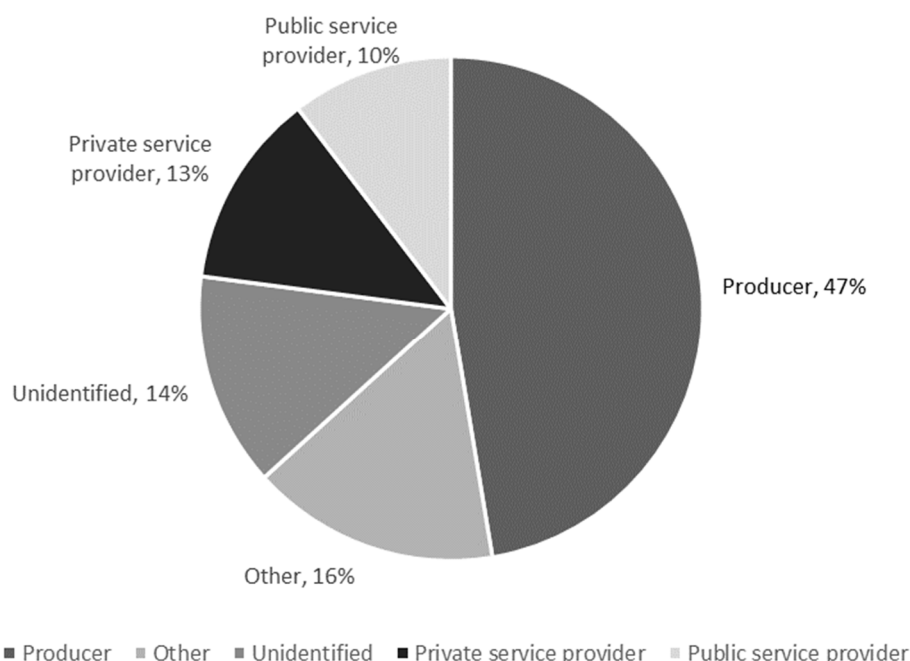
**Webinar recordings** Forty-six (of 49) FutureBeef webinars have been recorded and saved on the FutureBeef YouTube channel and uploaded to the FutureBeef website. Three webinars were not recorded or made public at the request of the presenters. There has been a total of 27,261 views of these recordings and a total watch time 3234 hours.

The average view duration of the webinar recordings is low (approximately 7 minutes) compared to the entire recording length (average 38 minutes). However, the webinar recordings are saved as both the entire recording for people to watch as well as a playlist so viewers can easily jump to the section of interest. This allows people to only watch a small section of the webinar rather than the whole recording.

### eBulletin

Between July 2017 and January 2022, 54 editions of the eBulletin have been published to 6288 subscribers, with an average open rate of 32.7% (range 27.6-38.6%) and click rate of 8.6% (range 5.6-12.8%). Open rate is how many ebulletins were opened by subscribers while click rate is how many ebulletins registered at least one link click. The main role or occupation of the current eBulletin subscribers is highlighted in Figure 4, almost half are producers and a quarter service providers.

**Figure 4. Main role of FutureBeef eBulletin subscribers**

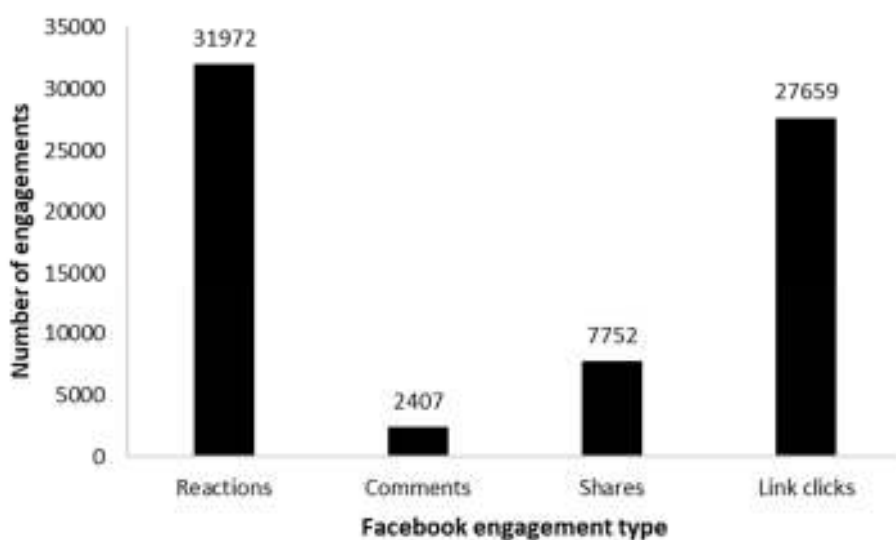


Source: MailChimp analytics in Sallur et al. 2022.

**Social media**

*Facebook* FutureBeef joined Facebook in January 2012, and as of January 2022, 10,761 people have 'liked' the FutureBeef profile on Facebook. Between July 2017 and January 2022, there have been 2626 posts published on the FutureBeef Facebook page. Engagement on FutureBeef Facebook over this period totals 69,790 and is made up of reactions, comments, shares and link clicks (Figure 5). Between July 2017 and January 2022 there has also been 52,412 referrals from Facebook to the FutureBeef website.

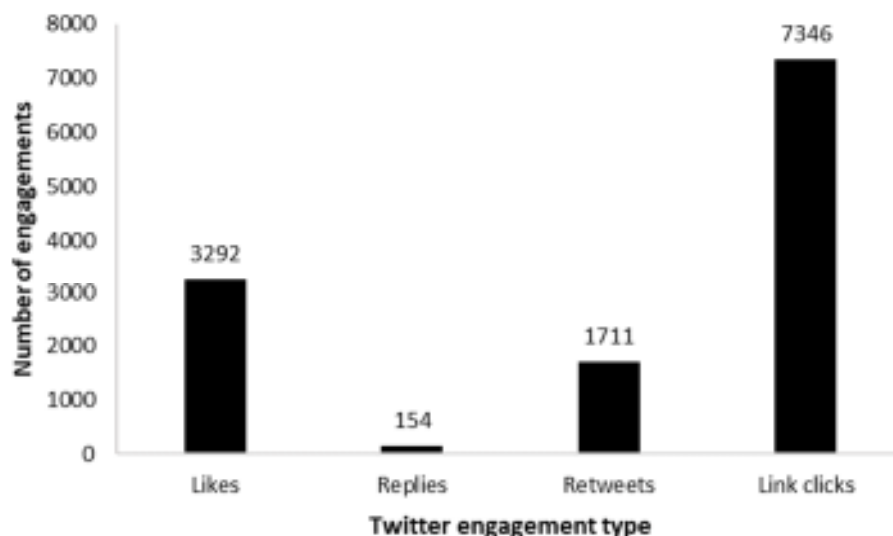
**Figure 5. FutureBeef Facebook engagement as reactions, comments, shares and link clicks between 1 July 2017 and 31 January 2022**



Source: Hootsuite and AgoraPulse analytics in Sallur et al. 2022.

*Twitter* FutureBeef joined Twitter in May 2012 and as of January 2022, there were 6784 followers. Between July 2017 and January 2022, there have been 2066 tweets on the FutureBeef Twitter account. Engagement with FutureBeef on Twitter over this period (July 2017 to January 2022) totals 12,503 and is shown in Figure 6. Between July 2017 and January 2022 there were 5689 referrals from Twitter to the FutureBeef website.

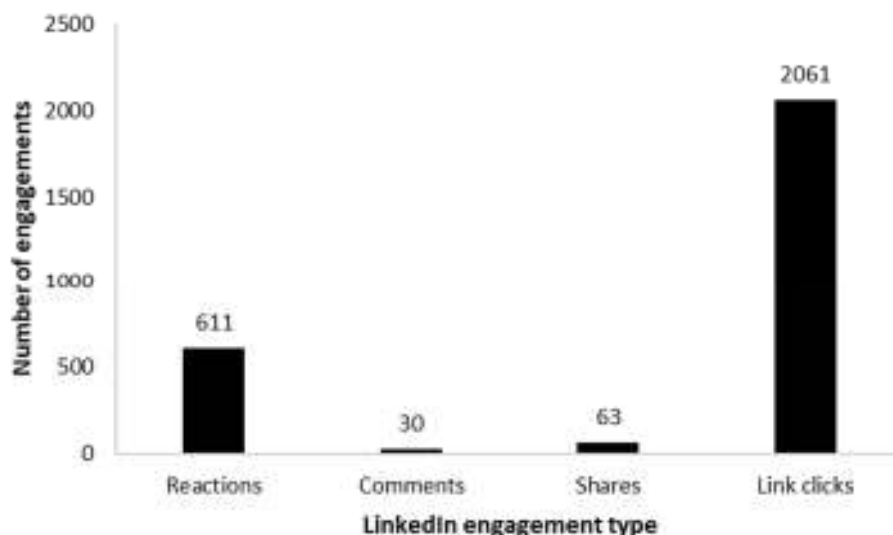
**Figure 6. FutureBeef Twitter engagement as reactions, comments, retweets and link clicks between July 2017 and January 2022**



Source: Hootsuite and AgoraPulse analytics in Sallur et al. 2022.

*LinkedIn* FutureBeef joined LinkedIn in June 2020, and as of January 2022, had 1276 followers and published 108 posts. Engagement with FutureBeef LinkedIn over this period totals 2765 and is shown in Figure 7. Between July 2017 and January 2022 there were 815 referrals from LinkedIn to the FutureBeef website. Referrals to the FutureBeef website from LinkedIn was occurring prior to the creation of the FutureBeef LinkedIn account, as others were posting links to the FutureBeef website that were being clicked on by other users.

**Figure 7. FutureBeef LinkedIn engagement as reactions, comments, shares and link clicks June 2020 – January 2022**



Source: Hootsuite and AgoraPulse analytics in Sallur et al. 2022.

**Conclusions**

The FutureBeef website is the backbone of the project as most of the other FutureBeef communication tools link to it. This includes webinar recordings, ebulletin articles and social media posts (with 58,916 referrals from social media to the website).

Webinars are a key tool for FutureBeef. The topic and timing of webinars influence registrations and attendance, with more timely and relevant topics being most popular. Webinar recordings are an often-used resource. Average view duration of webinars is low compared to the entire recording length which indicates people are using the playlist to just watch the sections of most interest.



The FutureBeef eBulletin is another key tool for promotion and engagement as is FutureBeef social media. They are both important awareness raising devices (particularly of critical current issues) and to direct people to the website. Time and staff capacity to update and review website information is critical as is improving the website to enhance user experience.

More consideration needs to be given to webinar delivery and attendee engagement to enhance their ability to influence practice change. Improvements to both the eBulletin and social media channels are also necessary to continue to enhance its use and user experience.

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